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No need for campus secrecy

The purpose of a university is to collect information and pass on knowledge to students and the public. The tendency of the CIA is to collect information and then mark it Top Secret.

These two opposing roles are bound to collide as the CIA seeks to strengthen its ties to academia.

The CIA, stung by intelligence gaffes such as its failure to predict the downfall of the Shah of Iran, says it needs all the good advice it can get from the nation's professors. That seems reasonable enough. The nation's security depends upon good intelligence.

However, the best advice can be gained aboveboard and discussed in the open. There is little need for the CIA to commission secret research on U.S. campuses.

In a recent Outlook article, John Kenneth Galbraith, a former U.S. ambassador to India, said he never encountered any official secrets he had not already learned from public sources, or would have learned soon enough. He noted two CIA intelligence analysts in India who learned far more information by operating openly than they would have if they had tried to spy in secret.

That is the case with university professors. If the CIA wishes to avail itself of their research and acumen, well and good. But keeping such a relationship secret would tend to taint the information, limit the effectiveness of the professors involved and pervert the proper nature of the university.

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